DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 669 PS 016 714

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TITLE Self-Concept Development of Gambian Elementary School Children.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Students; Foreign Countries; Grade 2; Grade 4; Grade 6; Grade 8; *Self Concept; Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS *Gambia; Students Self Assessment Inventory

ABSTRACT

This study examined the self-concept of elementary school children enrolled in grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 of schools in the West African country of Gambia. Measures of self-concept in the areas of physical maturity, peer relations, academic success, and school adaptiveness were obtained from 156 students. The mean scores of the students were subjected to a series of two-way analyses of variance. Independent variables were sex and grade level. For the dependent variables, each area of self-concept was subdivided into three subsets: self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-ideal. Results indicated that grade level was the most important variable in the self-concept development of the students, a finding supporting previous studies. The effect of sex, however minimal, was sometimes associated with grade level, a result which contradicts findings on children of Western culture which indicate that the role of sex is negligible. Overall, analyses suggest that (1) the patterns of self-concept development among Gambian school children were different according to the self-concept area being tested, and (2) the developmental experiences of school children in Gambia were similar to those of students in Western culture. (Author/RH)

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Self-Concept Development of Gambian Elementary School Children

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Summary

This study examined the self-concept of elementary school children, in grades 2, 4, 6, and 8, from the West African country of Gambia. Measures of self-concept in the areas of physical maturity, peer relations, academic success, and school adaptiveness were obtained from 156 Gambian students. The mean scores of the students were subjected to a series of two-way analyses of variance. The independent variables were sex and grade level(2, 4, 6, & 8). For the dependent variables, each self-concept area was subdivided into its three subsets, self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-ideal.

The results of this study indicated that grade level was the most important variable in the self-concept development of the students, supporting previous studies. The effect of sex, however minimal, was sometimes associated with grade level. The overall analyses indicated that the developmental experiences of school children in Gambia were similar to those of school children in Western culture.

Self-Concept Development of Gambian Elementary School Children

Introduction

It has been postulated that self-concept develops as a result of interaction between the individual and the environment. Since cultural environments are not identical, it would seem reasonable that individuals from different cultures would have different patterns of self-concept development. However, cross-cultural self-concept studies have found similar effects of school experiences on the positiveness of self-concept of American school children (Larned & Muller, 1979). Subsequent data collected on Mexican, Chilean, and American school children indicated similar self-concept developmental patterns: a) the self-concept developmental patterns were different according to the self-concept area being tested, b) no self-concept differences existed between the sexes of the same grade level, c) grade level was the most potent variable in the self-concept development of the school children, and d) the role of gender in the development of self-concept was minimal.

While most of these studies have taken place on the continents of the Americas with subjects of European descent, the researchers have suggested that the results may have worldwide implications. This study was undertaken to determine the extent to which such suggestion is valid.

Method

The sample groups used in this study were randomly selected from a school in the Banjul region of Gambia. While the school was not randomly selected, it catered to children of different socio-economic levels and tribal descent. With the exception of grade 8 having only 36 subjects, a sample group of forty subjects represented each grade level, 2, 4, and 6. Thus, a total of 156 children were involved in this study.

Testing Instrument

The testing instrument used in this study was the Student's Self-Assessment Inventory (SSI) developed by Muller, Larned and Leonetti (1981). The SSI was designed to assess the self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-ideal of four independent self-concept areas. These areas are physical maturity, peer relations, academic success, and school adaptiveness. The SSI assumes an area-specific model of self-concept theory and it assesses the self-concept of children in functional areas directly related to the school environment. This instrument has been used in testing American, Mexican, and Chilean school children (Velasco-Barraza & Muller, 1982). The validity and reliability of the SSI were established in a separate report by Larned in 1978.

Results

The mean scores by grade level are presented in table 1. Each of the 12 self-measures was subjected to a sex by grade

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analysis of variance followed by a Newman-Keuls analysis of mean differences.

Physical maturity: The analysis of variance test on the means of Gambian school children yielded a significant grade main effect for all self measures of physical maturity: self-knowledge, $F=9.21$ (3,148), $p<.05$, self-esteem, $F=7.8$ (3,148), $p<.05$, self-ideal, $F=6.61$ (3,148), $p<.05$. Further testing of the means by the use of Newman-Keuls analysis indicated that the mean score for grade four was significantly higher than the mean score for grades two, four, and eight in the area of self-knowledge and self-ideal. For self-esteem, however, the mean score for grade four was significantly lower than the mean scores for grades two, six, and eight.

The analysis yielded no significant sex main effect or grade by sex interaction for all the self measures. Subsequent Newman-Keuls analysis of the interaction means revealed the mean scores of both sexes for grade four were significantly higher than the mean scores for grade two boys and both sexes of grade eight in the area of self-knowledge. For self-esteem, the mean score for grade four boys was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade four girls and both sexes of grades two, six, and eight. In the case of self-ideal, the mean score for grade two boys was significantly lower than the mean scores for grades four of both sexes while the mean score for grade six boys was significantly lower than grade four boys.

Peer relations: In the area of peer relations the analysis indicated a significant grade main effect for all self measures: self-knowledge, F=21.3 (3,148), p<.05, self-esteem, F=11.93 (3,148), p<.05, and self-ideal, F=22.3 (3,148), p<.05. Newman-Keuls analysis conducted on grade level means revealed that the mean score for grade six was significantly lower than the mean scores for grades two, four, and eight. The mean score for grade four was significantly lower than the mean score for grade eight in the area of self-knowledge. In the area of self-esteem, the mean score for grade four was significantly lower than the mean score for grades two, six, and eight. For self-ideal, the mean score for grade eight was significantly higher than the mean scores for grades two four and six, while the mean score for grade six was significantly lower than the mean score for grades two, four, and eight.

The analysis of variance yielded a significant grade by sex interaction in the areas of self-knowledge and self-ideal but not in the area of self-esteem: self-knowledge, F=4.05 (3,148), p<.05, self-ideal, F=3.21 (3,148), p<.05. Sex main effect was not significant in all self measures. The Newman-Keuls analysis done on the grade by sex interaction means showed that the mean score for grade six girls was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade six boys and both sexes of grades two, four, and eight. Also, the mean score for grade six boys was significantly lower than the mean scores of both sexes of grades two, four,

and, eight in the area of self-knowledge. For self-esteem, the mean score for grade 4 boys was significantly lower than the mean scores of both sexes of grades two, six, and eight but, not significantly different from grade four girls. In the area of self-ideal, the mean score for grade six girls was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade six boys and both sexes of grades two, four, and eight.

Academic success: The analysis of variance conducted on the Gambia data revealed a significant grade main effect, F=33.36 (3,148), p=.05, sex main effect, F=4.67 (1,148), p<.05, and grade by sex interaction, F=5.34 (3,148), p<.05 in the area of self-knowledge. In the area of self-esteem, the analysis yielded a significant grade main effect, F=13.66 (3,148), p<.05, and grade by sex interaction, F=2.84 (3,148), p<.05. For self-ideal, only the grade main effect was found significant, F=9.02 (3,148), p<.05. When the grade level mean scores were subjected to a Newman-Keuls analysis, the results indicated the mean score for grade eight was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade two, four, and six in the areas of self-knowledge and self-esteem. The mean score for grade two was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade four and six in the area of self-knowledge. In the area of self-esteem, the mean score for grade four was significantly lower than the mean score for grade six. For self-ideal, the mean scores for grades two and eight were significantly higher than the mean scores for grades four and

six.

The Newman-Keuls analysis done on the grade by sex interaction mean scores indicated that the mean score for grade eight boys was significantly lower than the mean scores for both sexes of grades two, four, and six but, not significantly different from the mean score for grade eight girls in the area of self-knowledge. Also, the mean score for grade two girls was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade two boys and both sexes of grades four and six. For self-esteem, the mean scores for grades four boys and both sexes of grade eight were significantly lower than the mean scores for grades two boys and both sexes of grade six. In the area of self-ideal, the mean score for grade four girls was significantly lower than the mean score for grade four boys and both sexes of grades two, six, and eight.

School adaptiveness: When subjected to the analysis of variance, the school adaptiveness mean scores revealed a significant grade main effect for all the self measures: self-knowledge, $F=17.60$ (3,148), $p<.05$, self-esteem, $F=10.77$ (3,148), $p<.05$, self-ideal, $F=4.49$ (3,148), $p<.05$. A significant sex main effect was indicated for self-knowledge, $F=5.53$ (1,148), $p<.05$, and a significant grade by sex interaction was indicated for all self measures: self-knowledge, $F=4.31$ (3,148), $p<.05$, self-esteem, $F=3.79$ (3,148), $p<.05$, and self-ideal, $F=2.99$ (3,148), $p<.05$. The Newman-Keuls analysis conducted on the grade level

means revealed that the mean score for grade eight was significantly lower than the mean scores for grades two, four, and six, while the mean score for grade two was significantly lower than the mean score for grade six in the area of self-knowledge. For self-esteem and self-ideal, the mean scores for grades two and six were significantly higher than the mean scores for grades four and eight. The Newman-Keuls analysis on mean differences between sexes revealed that the mean score for males was significantly higher than the mean score for females for self-knowledge.

The Newman-Keuls analysis on the means of grade by sex interaction indicated that the mean scores for grade two girls and both sexes of grade eight were significantly lower than the mean scores for grade two boys, both sexes of grade four and six in the area of self-knowledge. For self-esteem, the mean scores for grade two boys and grade six girls were significantly higher than the mean scores of the rest, while the mean score for grade eight girls was significantly lower than the mean scores for grades two boys, and both sexes of grade six. The mean score for grade four boys was found to be significantly lower than the mean scores for boys of grades two and eight, and both sexes of grade six, while the mean score for grade four girls was significantly lower than the mean scores for grade two boys and grade six girls. In the area of self-ideal, the mean score for grade four girls was significantly lower than the mean scores for grades two

boys and grade six girls. Also, the mean score for grade two boys was significantly higher than the mean score for grade eight boys.

Discussion

From the 12 two-factorial analyses of variance conducted on the mean scores of the tested children, grade level was found to be significant on 12 occasions, the sex variable was found to be significant on 2 occasions, and grade by sex interaction was found to be significant on 7 occasions. In addition, the self-concepts of the children in the four self-measures were found to be differentiated as in the case of children of Western culture (Larned & Muller, 1979, and Velasco-Barraza & Muller, 1982).

While grade level of the children emanated as the most important variable in the analyses, it seemed associated with the sex of the child in the areas of peer relations, academic success, and school adaptiveness. Further examination of the mean scores with Newman-Keuls analyses revealed the self-concept of males to be significantly higher than those of their female counterparts in the same self-concept areas. The behavior of the sex variable was selective: it played a role in the self-knowledge of academic success and school adaptiveness of the children while it had no effect in the areas of physical maturity and peer relations. These results contradict research findings on children of the Western culture where the role of sex has been reported to be negligible. The only area in which the

self-concept of girls were found to be significantly higher than boys was physical maturity. This result may be indicative of the widely known phenomenon that females mature at a faster rate than males.

In the areas of academic success and school adaptiveness, the self-knowledge of eight graders were found to be sharply lower than other grade levels. Such findings were reported by Larned & Muller (1979), and Velasco-Barraza & Muller (1982), in their study of rural southwestern New Mexican, Mexican, and Chilean school children.

The overall analyses of this study suggested that self-concept developmental patterns of Gambian school children were different according to the self-concept area being tested. While differences were detected between the sexes of the same grade level, the role of sex in the development of self-concept among the Gambian school children was minimal. The emanation of grade level as the most potent variable, a phenomenon found to exist among Anglo, Mexican, and Chilean school children, suggests that schools may be providing similar educational and developmental experiences to children irrespective of the cultural environments in which they exist.

TABLE 1

MEANS OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND SELF-IDEAL SCORES FOR GAMBIAN CHILDREN IN GRADES 2, 4, 6, AND 8

Measure	2	4	6	8
		Physical maturity		
Self-knowledge	3.0	4.6	3.2	3.0
Self-esteem	5.1	4.1	5.3	5.2
Self-ideal	3.3	4.6	3.3	3.5
		Peer relations		
Self-knowledge	4.2	3.8	2.3	4.8
Self-esteem	5.3	3.6	5.1	5.1
Self-ideal	4.1	3.9	2.4	5.1
		Academic success		
Self-knowledge	3.6	4.4	4.5	1.9
Self-esteem	4.6	4.0	5.2	3.1
Self-ideal	5.2	4.3	4.5	5.2
		School adaptiveness		
Self-knowledge	4.5	4.9	5.4	2.9
Self-esteem	5.1	3.7	5.4	4.3
Self-ideal	4.5	4.9	5.4	4.8
		Number of children		
Boys	20	20	20	20
Girls	20	20	20	16

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